

NARRATOR: Strom, Bert

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: February 21, 2001

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Introduction.
010	Strom was born in Alaska and moved to Washington during his teenage years. He attended University of Washington for one year and began work with the forest service in the Blister Rust program near Bovill, Idaho. He also talked about the other work he did during his early years on the St. Joe National Forest. He offered additional information about his life, including his marriage and his two non-continuous terms with the United States Army. Strom worked for the forest service in various capacities and on different national forests in Idaho from the 1950s through the 1990s. Most of these jobs involved forest fire control or management. After 1995 Strom has worked for the Idaho Department of Lands.
105	Strom described the Blister Rust program that he worked on in the middle of the 1950s in northern Idaho. He offered his opinions on the positives and negatives in the Blister Rust program. He recalled the quantity and quality of food at those camps. He also talked about how he received his appointment to the Blister Rust program.
170	When asked by the interviewer, Strom detailed how his early life focused his energy toward a career in forestry. He talked about his early years in Alaska and his father's job, both of which helped Strom grow an appreciation for the outdoors. He also mentioned how he advanced in the forest service without the benefit of a college degree.
205	After a year in college, Strom served as an aerial observer and assistant dispatcher near St. Maries. He talked about the various other jobs he held when not working for the forest service. He stayed with jobs in northern Idaho, because that was where people knew him. He talked about how "non-professionals" needed to transfer to another forest to advance within the forest service.
255	He felt that he never transferred somewhere he did not want to. Although he did talk about taking a job when national forests consolidated that he did not really want. He did mention that this particular job (recreation/law enforcement/special uses) did give him an opportunity to be a snow ranger.

- 285 In the 1970s he transferred to the Salmon National Forest, and he talked about the difference fighting fire on that forest. He also described the details in his transfer from the Salmon to the Boise National Forest. He talked about being a fire management (or control) officer on the Boise National Forest, particularly when the districts within the forest consolidated. Strom received an appointment to a zone fire management officer position on the Boise National Forest due to his experience on other forests and other jobs.
- 355 Strom detailed how fires were spotted on the St. Joe National Forest in the 1950s. He talked about lookouts and aerial observation. Strom rode in an airplane to watch for fires in that forest. They tried to find fires that lookouts possibly could not see, and they served as aerial support to fire fighters on the ground.
- 440 During his time as an aerial observer, he also worked as an assistant dispatcher. He described what he did when he worked at that position.
- 485 Strom wore a parachute when he rode in a plane as an aerial observer. He did not recall any problems with a plane when he flew on them.
- 505 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
- 000 Storm told a story about one pilot who taught Strom a little about flying. This pilot had some physical problems on one flight, so Strom helped him fly the plane during that patrol. Strom also mentioned one flight when the plane stalled why the pilot switched fuel tanks. He continued to tell two stories about difficult landings while riding in a helicopter, but no one was hurt.
- 055 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom described the improvements in transportation during his decades with the Forest Service. He specifically talked about the improvements in airplanes and helicopters, particularly in transporting people and fire retardant to remote locations.
- 115 During his years on temporary employment with the Forest Service, Strom did fight fires. He talked about his early years and his first forest fires. He did mention that he did not fight fire full time during his early years. He talked about his later years in forest fire fighting and the places he went to fight fire (mainly in Idaho and other states in the West).
- 155 Strom talked about the physical and mental training to fight fires. He also said that experience on fires served as the best training tool. He also

mentioned that experience was necessary to be on a “hot-shot” crew or a smokejumper.

195 After Strom finished his second stint with the military, he returned to the forest service in northern Idaho. He mentioned how he got his job as a fire control officer on a district in the St. Joe National Forest. He talked about how he felt when he became a fire control officer; he felt comfortable with the fire aspects but not so much with the office aspects. He talked about how people with fire experience (but not academic experience) could have trouble with a fire control officer job, because of the management and paperwork aspects of the job.

270 Strom explained the numerous tasks of the fire control officer, particularly on the Clarkia and Calder districts in the St. Joe National Forest. He detailed one aspect of his job, setting proscribed burns in the fall. He talked about the career of one Forest Service employee, Dale Gerrell [?] or Jerrell [?].

380 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom talked, in detail, about a “typical” day as a fire control officer during the fire season. Not all of these tasks during the fire season dealt with forest fires.

490 Strom began to talk about the changes in communication during his decades in the forest service, beginning with the radio.

505 **END OF SIDE TWO**
TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

000 [No introduction.] Strom continued his thoughts about improvements in communications. The radio has stayed and improved in fire fighting, but people now use pagers and cellular phones.

025 Storm talked about the improvements in transportation, particularly trucks and fire engines.

040 When asked by the interviewer, Strom told his memories about big fires or big fire years in northern Idaho in the 1960s. He thought that northern Idaho does not have the big fires that people see in southern Idaho. He talked about one year that a lightning storm ignited 300 fires on the St. Joe National Forest. He also mentioned a human caused fire near Elsie Peak in northern Idaho; the crews hiked twelve miles into that fire. On that fire a plane dropped a half of beef onto the fire; the beef came apart from the parachute, and they never found the beef.

100 Strom talked about the Sundance fire in 1967. He did not fight that fire; he and two other people stayed on their district. They did give almost all

of their equipment to the crews fighting that fire. He felt those fire seasons are cyclical, with bad years happening every six or seven years.

140 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom talked about the forest service's "10 a.m. Policy" to control fires. He also mentioned how the forest service changed from fighting every fire to managing fires on the forests, controlling some and allowing some to burn. He talked about the first fire (near Stanley) that they managed and did not aggressively fight.

200 Strom offered his opinions from controlling every fire to managing every fire. He felt that both ideas had their good and bad points. He mentioned the differences between wild land suppression and structural suppression, including the concepts of the forest/urban interface, proscribed fire, and how different stands of timber burn.

290 Strom agreed with the interviewer's claim of the forest service being caught "between a rock and a hard place." He talked about the change in the relationship between the Forest Service and the general public from the 1950s to the present day. He particularly mentioned on how meetings designed for the public to voice their opinions has had both positive and negative affects on this relationship. He felt it was difficult to manage the land later in his Forest Service career.

355 **END OF SIDE ONE**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Boise National Forest
Bovill, Idaho
Calder, Idaho
Clarkia, Idaho
Elsie Peak fire (Idaho, 1960s)
Gerrell [?], Dale
Jerrell [?], Dale
Missoula, Montana
National Interagency Fire Center (Boise, Idaho)
Salmon National Forest
St. Joe National Forest
St. Maries, Idaho
Stanley, Idaho
Sundance fire (Idaho, 1967)
United States Forest Service

NARRATOR: Strom, Bert

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: June 14, 2001

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter Summary

000	Introduction.
010	During the 1970s, Strom transferred from the St. Maries district in the Idaho Panhandle National Forest to the North Fork district on the Salmon-Challis National Forest. Strom provided an overview of the transfer, his time on the Salmon-Challis National Forest.
080	Due to his wife's poor health, Strom requested and received a hardship transfer to the Emmett district on the Boise National Forest. He described his work on this forest, including the move from being a fire management officer to a zone fire management officer, when the forest reorganized and consolidated.
140	He explained the large amount of travel involved in being a zone fire management officer. He talked about an automobile accident that he and his family were involved in on December 4, 1984. Strom was injured the worst, and he spent several months in the hospital rehabilitating from his injuries. This accident moved him from fire management to fire analysis and fire planning.
185	In 1989 he became a fire planner for the Boise National Forest. His official title was assistant fire staff. He explained the aspects of his job, which were mainly pre-suppression activities. Strom retired from the forest service in May 1994.
215	After retirement from the forest service, he began working part time for the Idaho Department of Lands in fire analysis and planning, mainly using the computer to create maps and to decide which group would fight fires on what lands within Idaho. Strom explained his work for the Idaho Department of Lands, in detail.
345	Strom described his current work with the lands department, which is working with the national intragency fire management analysis, incorporating the national model into Idaho.
415	With prompting from the interviewer, Strom talked about the bureaucratic aspect of the Idaho Department of Lands, specifically how the fire

management aspects. Strom offered an overview of the lands department's fire role.

500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
 TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 Strom continued to discuss the lands department's role in fire management. Strom described ten lands department districts and two fire protective associations, which are mainly funded by two large corporations—Boise Cascade and Potlatch. He also offered job descriptions of numerous job titles within the organization.

100 The Idaho Department of Lands, according to Strom, does not have large crews to fight fires. He explained what types of crews and equipment are under the auspices of the lands department.

130 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom described, in detail, the various types of national overhead crews that come together to fight project fires. The groups work under the incident command system, and they can fight fires or aid with national emergencies, such as earthquakes or floods. Strom also mentioned the different types of "hot shot" crews that actually fight the fire.

245 Strom provided his remembrances of the rise of the incident command system. When Strom began with the forest service, he did not see a lot of interagency cooperation, even though everyone fought fire the same way. He briefly described the rise of interagency cooperation, including the Boise Interagency Fire Center (now the National Interagency Fire Center) and the incident command system. He also explained the rise of standard language to train all fire fighters, regardless of what group he or she works for.

325 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom talked about why California might have lead the nation in the incident command system. He continued to talk about the importance of interagency cooperation to manage forest fires.

360 Strom participated in a roundtable for a symposium for Boise State University's Anthropology department. One question during that session involved last year (2000) fire season. Strom talked about last year's fire season, including wilderness fires and fires in the wild land/urban interface. He opined that he tried not to second-guess current fire decisions, because he does not know the specifics behind each project fire. He gave an example of a large fire that outside people who did not understand the situation questioned their fire plan.

485 **END OF SIDE TWO**
 TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

000 [No introduction.] Strom continued to talk about the current fire season by referring back to his experience with large fires. He talked about how a large fire can allow people to make large profits and allow forest service district increase their fire cache. He also talked about the increased technology that lets him understand current project fires through information on the internet. He mentioned one fire last year that he “signed in” on a website, and he received a response from a person who worked with Strom during his time on Salmon-Challis National Forest.

045 Strom stated that he keeps track on current fires, because he fought fires for forty years. It is tough, therefore, to get fire out of your blood. He also mentioned that his age would preclude him from doing much fire fighting today.

075 Strom offered his detailed opinions on how he would spend the large infusion of money given to federal agencies (United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management) to battle blazes in the forest. He talked about the national interagency fire management analysis and the possible peril of this large (possibly one time) infusion of money.

185 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom talked about how large fire seasons have occurred on a cyclical basis. He said that you could not predict, for sure, when big fires will occur.

220 Large fuel loads under trees, according to Strom (and most other forest fire managers), help fires become project fires. Strom described the science of fire, including ladder fuels, particularly the reason why keeping the fuel load under trees small benefits the forest.

275 Strom described his role on a type one incident command team. He had different jobs, so he described the aspects of each role. He also served on a type two incident command teams while working on the Boise and the Salmon-Challis National Forests.

370 **END OF SIDE ONE**
 END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Boise Cascade Corporation
Boise Interagency Fire Center (National Interagency Fire Center)
Boise National Forest
Boise, Idaho
Bureau of Land Management
Burnt Flats fire (Idaho)
Clearwater Potlatch Timber Protective Association
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Dittmer, Ken
Emmett, Idaho
Hughes Creek (Idaho)
Idaho Department of Lands
Mahoney Creek fire (Idaho)
North Fork, Idaho
Potlatch Corporation
Raddatz, Steve
Salmon River
Salmon-Challis National Forest
Southern Idaho Timber Protective Association
Stevens, Gordon
United States Forest Service

NARRATOR: Strom, Bert

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: August 31, 2001

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Introduction.
010	Strom offered his opinions about the 2001 fire season. He talked about the increased funding and the decreased occurrences of lightning this summer. He said that the conditions in the state currently are very dry, so there could be large fires during the end of the season. He also described some fires during this season that almost burned small towns in Washington, Wyoming, and Idaho.
100	Strom continued to discuss the 2001 fire season, particularly the Thirty Fire mile in central Washington, where several firefighters lost their lives. Strom also mentioned other firefighters, specifically pilots, who died during this fire season.
150	With prompting from the interviewer, Strom talked about the large increase of money for firefighting this year, and the problem with funding for firefighting over his forty-plus years fighting fire. Strom felt that this funding needs to continue, but he feared that the funding would slow. He said that individuals in the urban/wildland interface must educate and work for themselves to prevent forest fires.
235	Strom furnished his thoughts about the roadless initiative policy, particularly in regards to forest firefighting.
300	In regards to prescribed burning, Strom told a story about a current fire manager who did not allow a prescribed burn in an area in August because of conditions that could have caused the fire to break containment.
355	Over his forty-plus years in forest fire fighting/planning/management, Strom has seen the public's attitude towards the United States Forest Service (and other federal agencies). He explained his theories for why that has happened. He also explained why some agencies cannot "play with fire," because their constituency want all fires contained quickly.
425	With the growing urban/wildland interface, fire fighters not only fight the fire but also protect the structures. Strom talked about how that can put fire fighters in more danger than just firefighting.

450 **END OF SIDE ONE**
 TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 Strom talked about two private organizations, CPTPA (Clearwater
Potlatch Timber Protective Association) and SITPA (Southern Idaho
Timber Protective Association), that work with the Idaho State
Department of Lands. He provided an overview of those two groups and
their relationship to the state department of lands.

105 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom described how a fire
management officer worked with the forest service employees in charge of
timber sales. He also explained how this relationship changed over time.

155 During the non-fire months, the fire management officer (or fire planner or
fire staff) had numerous jobs. Strom offered an overview of the aspects of
his jobs during the non-fire season.

190 One of Strom's jobs during non-fire season was training forest service
employees about fire. He explained the benefits and detriments of that
specific job.

210 With prompting from the interviewer, Strom explained how his non-fire
season jobs changed during his decades with the forest service, depending
on his change in job or a change in policy.

280 Strom felt a positive relationship with smokejumpers during his time as a
fire management officer. He offered his opinion on smokejumpers and
talked about how other forest service employees perceived the jumpers.

335 To advance in the forest service (in fire), according to Strom, one needed a
college degree and skill with computers. He also said that forest service
employee must learn how to deal with the public effectively.

395 Strom furnished his remembrances about his time fighting fire (in all of
his roles). He mentioned several different aspects of his jobs that he
enjoyed.

450 **END OF SIDE TWO**
 END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Banks, Idaho
Boise Cascade Corporation
Bureau of Land Management
Clearwater Potlatch Timber Protective Association (CPTPA)
Dude fire (Arizona)
Idaho State Department of Lands
Jackson Hole, Wyoming
Leavenworth, Washington
National Interagency Fire Center
Potlatch Corporation
Rough Diamond fire (near Silver City, Idaho, 2001)
Silver City, Idaho
Southern Idaho Timber Protective Association (SITPA)
Thirty Mile fire (near Leavenworth, Washington, 2001)
United States Forest Service